

VZCZCXRO4798
OO RUEHPA
DE RUEHJL #0695/01 3131530
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 091530Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY BANJUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7115
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE//POLAD/J2//
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000695

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PINS](#) [SG](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: ONGOING TENSIONS WITH SENEGAL

REF: A. BANJUL 230 ET AL

[1](#)B. BANJUL 574 (ALL NOTAL)

BANJUL 00000695 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Senegalese Ambassador Fall noted heightened Sengalese/Gambian strains due to GOTG's support for dissident Casamance rebel MFDC leader Salif Sadio, coupled with Gambian actions against pro-conciliation MFDC elements such as Magne Dieme. Fall said Senegalese armed forces chief would visit here in mid-November to register Dakar's growing concern over the GOTG's unhelpful posture on the Casamance issue; Fall also expected President Wade to reiterate that concern during his expected attendance at Gambian President Jammeh's inauguration, scheduled for December 15. Fall gave assurances of the GOTG's commitment to resolving the mounting tensions with The Gambia through peaceful diplomacy, but warned that Dakar might eventually be compelled to exert economic pressure -- e.g., repetition of the 2005 border closure with The Gambia -- if the GOTG's meddling in the Casamance continued indefinitely. Fall acknowledged Jammeh's ongoing suspicions of the GOS in connection with the failed coup plot here in March, expressed satisfaction with the GOTG's treatment of refugees from the Casamance, and indicated that key bilateral projects were currently on hold due to the increased tensions. Fall's remarks about mounting bilateral strains are troubling, although he made clear Dakar's intention to do its part to avoid a major rupture in ties. END SUMMARY.

SENEGALESE AMBASSADOR'S CONCERN

[1](#)2. (C) In November 8 conversation with Ambassador, Senegalese Ambassador Mamadou Fall spoke of growing concern in Dakar over ongoing GOTG support for renegade Casamance rebel leader, Salif Sadio. According to Fall, the GOTG continued to provide refuge in The Gambia to Sadio and his fighters and was possibly also funneling arms, money, and other assistance to him, notwithstanding denials by Gambian officials. Fall said the GOTG also persisted in acting against MFDC elements cooperating with the GOS on the peace efforts, by, for example, keeping in detention MFDC military leader Magne Dieme. Fall knocked down rumors of Dieme's release, asserting that Dieme either remained in detention or had died while in the Gambians' custody, given his long-standing medical problems.

UPCOMING HIGH LEVEL SENEGALESE VISITS

13. (C) Fall stated that Senegalese Armed Forces Chief of Staff would visit here in mid-November to discuss the Casamance situation and flag Dakar's mounting irritation over the GOTG's meddling. He added that President Wade planned to attend President Jammeh's inaugural ceremony, scheduled for December 15, and would hence serve as an occasion for Wade to confront Jammeh face-to-face over the Casamance dossier. In the interim, Fall went on, he himself hoped to meet with Jammeh to press for a more cooperative stance. The GOS, Fall continued, would "remain calm" and do its best to avoid further escalation of tensions. However he warned, if the Gambian meddling continued indefinitely, the GOS at some point might be compelled to "react" through economic pressure, e.g. closing the border with The Gambia and thereby bringing its re-export trade to a halt. Ambassador applauded Senegalese efforts to resolve the heightened tensions with The Gambia through peaceful diplomacy and urged that they continue; Fall gave assurances that Dakar would maintain its efforts in this regard and would give "ample time" for peaceful dialog to produce a solution before considering stronger action.

GOTG'S ONGOING SUSPICIONS

14. (C) Fall acknowledged Jammeh still harbored suspicions of GOS complicity in the coup plot foiled here in March and of harboring the plot's ringleader, former Chief of Defense Staff Col Ndure Cham. Fall said he could not rule out the possibility that Cham remained somewhere in Senegal, but disclaimed any knowledge of his whereabouts. He likewise professed ignorance of any Senegalese involvement in the failed plot, but did note allegations that his predecessor, Ndiouga Ndiaye, had had contact with a leading suspect, Tamsir Jasseh. (COMMENT: As previously reported -- e.g. ref a -- we are not aware of a "smoking gun" that would corroborate allegations of Senegalese complicity.

BANJUL 00000695 002.2 OF 002

Knowledgeable Gambian sources express conviction that Cham is in Senegal, probably in Dakar. END COMMENT)

REFUGEES

15. (C) Fall indicated that he remained in close contact with the GOTG regarding the recent influx of refugees into The Gambia resulting from clashes in the Casamance involving Sadio's fighters. He expressed satisfaction with Gambian authorities' treatment of the refugees, saying he had picked up no reports of abuses. Ambassador noted UNHCR statement that, as of late October, the number of refugees had reached 6,200, up from 5,000 as of early September (ref b); Fall responded that this latest figure struck him as too high, but that he had no solid basis for challenging it.

NO PROGRESS ON MAJOR BILATERAL PROJECTS

16. (C) Ambassador asked about the status of two key bilateral projects -- construction of a bridge across the Gambia river that would facilitate travel between Northern Senegal and the Casamance region and restoration of the Joint Permanent Secretariat to manage bilateral issues. (NOTE: The Joint

SIPDIS

Permanent Secretariat existed prior to the two countries' experiment with confederation in the 1980's. END NOTE). Fall responded that, in the current climate of heightened strains, both projects were on hold. He expressed hope that the anticipated Wade/Jammeh meeting here in mid-December would sufficiently clear the air between the two sides to permit a resumption of discussions on these projects.

COMMENT

17. (C) In Ambassador's September 15 meeting with Fall (ref b), he had spoken of an improved tenor in the overall Senegalese/Gambian relationship, while expressing concern over the GOTG's meddling in the Casamance. Fall's remarks in our latest conversation are troubling, as they indicate that the improved tenor has dissipated due to the GOTG's continued unhelpful posture on the Casamance as well as Jammeh's persistent suspicions of the GOS in connection with the failed coup plot. Our view remains that Jammeh's mischief-making in the Casamance may well be designed to serve as retaliation for suspected GOS involvement in the foiled plot and harboring of its ringleader. Fall made clear that Dakar would do its part to avoid a major rupture in ties and currently had no plans to ratchet up the pressure on the GOTG through a repetition of the August/October border closure -- in retaliation for the GOTG's abrupt imposition of sharp tariff increases for the Gambia river ferries heavily used by Senegalese transporters -- that caused substantial damage to the Gambian economy. END COMMENT.

STAFFORD